

City of Joliet to upgrade plaza, reopen Chicago Street

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Paving the way toward a desirable downtown upgrade, the city of Joliet has concurred with Will County on plans for the redevelopment of Chicago Street in a deal that includes trading specific property sites.

The plan was finalized after a period of several years, during which Chicago Street remained closed to traffic between Washington and Jefferson streets.

"Joliet has been growing rapidly ... and we're glad we could work with Mayor O'Dekirk and Joliet officials to further their development efforts," Will County board speaker Jim Moustis (R-Frankfort) said, according to the *Chicago Tribune*. "The collaboration between the county and city government, and the resulting deal, will benefit both Joliet and Will County residents."

Joliet City Center Partnership told the *Times-Weekly* that it is pleased to participate on the downtown advisory committee in relation to redevelopment planning.

Both the *Chicago Tribune* and the Joliet-based *Times-Weekly* reported progress when negotiations recently resulted in a successful agreement between the entities, with the Will County executive's office announcing the deal last week.

"(Every plan) indicates that reconnecting Chicago Street is key to revitalize downtown Joliet," Joliet Mayor Bob O'Dekirk told the *Chicago Tribune*, stating that reconnecting the thoroughfare was instrumental to the downtown's future infrastructure. "I am thrilled that we have worked out this deal."

Joliet City Center Partnership Chairman Bryan Kopman agreed, adding that the resulting new plaza will enhance the area, which has traditionally hosted large regular outdoor events, the *Times-Weekly* said.

"Redeveloping Chicago Street as a modern city center is central to the revitalization of downtown," Kopman said. "We host downtown Joliet's biggest events along Chicago Street. Building a new urban plaza would allow the city to upgrade everything including better lighting and sound design that could go a long way toward making Joliet a premier entertainment destination."

In order to allow the redevelopment to proceed efficiently, Will County agreed to swap certain parcels of real estate with the city. As a result, the county will obtain a parking lot formerly used for Metra from the city of Joliet. Officials said that Will County intends to upgrade both the physical site and its operation, shifting to automation, for example.

Public parking at the lot will be available for free during evening and weekend events, according to the *Times-Weekly*.

In return, the city will receive Van Buren Plaza, a location considered vital to the project. Currently, the former State's Attorney building is there; across from it is the historic Rialto Square Theater. Once complete, the new plaza not only will allow theatergoers and sightseers to drive more directly to their destinations, but it also will offer a greater number of parking spaces. There are currently 166 spaces and that is projected to exceed 200, the *Chicago Tribune* reported.

The plaza will be reconfigured to align with surrounding structures. When Chicago Street reopens, it will offer direct access to a multi-modal transportation hub, according to the *Times-Weekly*, along with pedestrian and bicycling options.

Joliet has attained an \$86,000 grant for redesign and landscaping costs from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for

Planning (CMAP), supplementing the grant with another \$40,000.

"Thanks to our staff, councilman John Gerl, and our good friends at Will County for once again coming together to improve our great city," O'Dekirk said, according to the *Chicago Tribune*. "(I) can announce that reconnecting Chicago Street and building the city center square is no longer just an idea, it will be a reality."